DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 078 TM 830 562

AUTHOR Svensson, Lennart; Theman, Jan
TITLE The Relation between Categories of Description and an Interview Protocol in a Case of Phenomenographic Research. [Report] 1983:02.
INSTITUTION Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Stockholm.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 48p.; Paper presented at the Annual Human Science Research Conference (2nd, Pittsburgh, PA, May 18-20, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Concept Formation; Content Analysis; *Data Analysis; Foreign Countries; *Interviews; *Political Power; Relationship; *Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS Contextual Analysis; *Phenomenography; Sweden (Gothenburg)

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with how the validity of a category describing a person's conception of a phenomenon is established. The presentation is confined to the relation between some categories of description and one interview protocol. The case described here is taken from an investigation into conceptions of political power. The description concerns how the thinking expressed in one interview may be found to represent several conceptions of political power described in the form of categories. The description of the analysis of the interview protocol concerns: selection of significant statements, delimitation of parts of the interview representing conceptions of power, the relation of the significant parts to the whole interview, the difference between the oral and the written version of the interview, and finally what is general to the approach of contextual analysis and what is specific to the present case. (Author/PN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R Sadja

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE RELATION BETWEEN CATEGORIES OF DESCRIPTION AND AN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL IN A CASE OF PHENOMENOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Paper presented at the Second Annual Human Science Research Conference, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, P.A. USA, May 18-20, 1983.

Lennart Svensson and Jan Theman

1983:02

(The research reported here has been financially supported by the Swedish Council for Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities.)

ABSTRACT

In the present report some methodological problems within a descriptive kind of research are dealt with. Descriptions of qualities and differences in qualities are fundamental to all research. Within the field of social and human sciences there is a special need for descriptions of qualities. In our present case, the qualities described concern people's different conceptions of various phenomena. This field of descriptive research is called phenomenography. The report concerns the contextual analysis through which the descriptions of conceptions are developed. The focus is on the relation between the categories of description developed through the contextual analysis and the data analysed. This relation is created through comparisons between different cases but in this context only the relation between the categories of description and the data in one case is dealt with.

The case described here is taken from an investigation into conceptions of political power. The description concerns how the thinking expressed in one interview may be found to represent several conceptions of political power described in the form of categories. The description of the analysis of the interview protocol concerns: selection of significant statements, delimitation of parts of the interview representing conceptions of power, the relation of the significant parts to the whole interview, the difference between the oral and the written version of the interview and finally what is general to the approach of contextual analysis and what is specific to the present case.

INTRODUCTION

The problem raised in this report concerns the validity of descriptions based on interview protocols. More specifically, it concerns how the validity of a category describing a person's conception of a phenomenon is established. The justification of descriptions, given in the form of categories, is dependent upon relations to other data and upon comparisons with other cases, in addition to the basis found in the interview protocol to which the description is referring. In this report we shall confine our presentation to the relation between som categories of description and one interview protocol. The discovery and the judgement of the significance of the description is dependent upon a wider theoretical and empirical context. However, the problem of the validity of the description in relation to the interview is still a quite distinct, although restricted, problem which justifies focussing on this problem per se.

The relation between an interview and a description based on that interview may be established and demonstrated in many different ways. How this is done depends on the aim of the investigation and what kind of description is expected to be the result. It also depends upon ideas about how the result is and should be arrived at, i.e. some methodology. The presentation in this report represents an exemplification and description of a certain kind of research result and a certain methodology. Before presenting the example chosen we will briefly and generally describe the kind of result aimed at. The related general methodological approach will be summarized after the description of the case.

DESCRIBING CONCEPTIONS

Describing conceptions may be said to be an interdisciplinary field of research. In several desciplines, there is a wide interest in people's conceptions. This situation has been described by Marton (1982), who argued for the recognition of descriptions of conceptions as a distinct field of research and he named this field phenomenography. The lack of recognition of this field as a general one is related to the fact that the descriptions have formed parts of different kinds of research specific to different disciplines or subdisciplines. For instance, they have been parts of describing memory and cognitive development in psychology, a part of describing learning and teaching in education, a part of describing cultures and subcultures in anthropology and ethnography and a part of describing historical persons, situations and developments within different fields of history.

There are differences in the descriptions of conceptions related to the fact that they represent parts of different contexts. These differences result from the concern for different phenomena of which the conceptions form parts. Still, there certainly is very much to be gained by comparing results from different fields. The most apparent basis for such comparisons is to be found in the similarity of the phenomena conceptualised. What is most naturally compared is conceptions of corresponding parts of the surrounding world. Although it is possible to compare descriptions of conceptions of corresponding phenomena given in different contexts on the basis of their similaritiy in content, such an enterprise actualises the question of commensurability of the descriptions and the question of whether there is a common conception of conceptions.

There certainly are different conceptions of conceptions. One difference, which we think is very important, concerns the relation between content and form. In a lot of research, the main concern is with concepts in a general sense. The concern is for concepts as entities in some sense. This is usu-

ally combined with a strong emphasis on the general form as the fundamental and interesting characteristic of the conception. In other research, the concern is with the specific content of the conception of some phenomenon. In most cases these concerns are both involved, but with an emphasis on one or the other. In describing the conceptions, this difference in emphasis may make a big difference. The concern for formal characteristics of conceptions has included a strong tendency to design data collections and analyses to directly focus on the formal aspects. The concern for indidual conceptions has included focussing on the specific content and often neglecting the more formal aspects of the conceptions.

We will not argue about the legitimacy of being interested mainly in the general form or the specific content of conceptions. The relevance of the one or the other interest is very much determined by the specific context of research. However, we want to make a point concerning the way of describing conceptions which applies irrespective of the main interest in the description. We suggest that conceptions consist of organised content and thus have both forms of organisation and specific contents. Descriptions of conceptions, therefore, should include form and content in relation to each other as a basis for understanding either the general form, the specific content or both. Such descriptions would also provide a common ground for comparing different descriptions, i.e. solve part of the problem of commensurability. The fundamental argument for making such descriptions, containing the relation between general form and specific content, is that they make the conclusions about both form and content more valid.

Descriptions of the kind argued for have been presented in reports from several investigations carried out by our research group (c.f. Dahlgren, 1975; Lybeck, 1981; Svensson, 1976; Säljö, 1975 and 1982; Wenestam, 1980). There is one important characteristic of our research, related to the way of describing conceptions, which will not be considered in the following presentation. This characteristic is that our

research has concerned qualitative differences between conceptions. That there exist fundamental qualitative differences in conceptions of parts of the surrounding world is taken to be a result of the constructive nature of conceptualisation. It is the constructive nature of conceptualisation that makes it so important to consider the general form and the specific content in relation to each other not to misinterpret the meaning of the one or the other.

The nature of a conception is that it represents a relation between an individual and a part of the world. The relation consists of the activity, the thinking, of the individual in relation to the part of the world concerned. Thus, what the conception is and what the conception is about has to be determined as two sides of the same phenomenon. At the same time, due to the constructive nature of conceptualisation there exists no neccessary general relation between these two sides. This is revealed by differences between individuals in their conceptions of the same part of the surrounding world. This has made it neccessary to distinguish between extension and intention when describing the meaning of words and concepts. In describing qualitative differences in conception we find an interdependent variation in both extension and intension.

There is a parallel between our view of conceptualisation and our view of the problem of describing conceptions. In describing conceptions, one is conceptualizing the conception of another individual as expressed through action or, more specifically, in communication. This is a constructive activity that may eventually lead to the development of new concepts, which is a main aim of research. The conceptualisation involves differentiation, grouping and organisation of parts. These activities are neccessary prerequisites of a description which is not an exact reproduction. In developing a description, there is a tension between the general form and the specific content. This tension, as was mentioned above, is treated differently depending on the type of

concern for conceptions. We consider the relation between the general form and the specific content to be a crucial problem in describing conceptions. We find the validity of the descriptions to be dependent upon describing form and content in relation to each other. Thus, we have to aim at descriptions that seem to satisfy this demand.

THE CASE

The case chosen is from an investigation concerning people's conceptions of political power. The investigaiton was carried out by Jan Theman (Theman, 1983). The participants in the investigation reasoned about a current situation and event in the political life of the municipality of Göteborg. The political issue involved concerned the building or not building of a garage in the center of the city. The political structure of the municipality is that of a parliamentary democracy. It could thus be expected that the members of the town council would represent the will of the majority of the people in the city. Furthermore, at the time of the final decision on the issue, local elections had recently been held and the issue of building a garage had been central in the election campaign. The former political majority (the right wing parties) were in favor of building the garage and the former political opposition (the socialists) were against. In the election, the right wing parties were ousted by the socialists. It could then be expected that the issue would have been settled as a result of the election, since the new majority was against the garage.

However, the administrative routines are such that the actual change of town councellors took place some months after the election. A final decision to start the building of the garage was taken during this interval. This provoked widespread protests and demonstrations against the project. When the work was to be started it was hindered by demonstrators occupying the site. Protest lists circulated and there was an intense debate about different aspects of the situation. Ultimately, no garage was built. The problem about which the par-

ticipants in the investigation reasoned concerned this conflict and how political power was manifested in the development of the conflict.

In the analysis of the interviews, the focus was on what, according to the interviewees, could be conceived of as political power in the situation. Here, we shall focus on what in our case can be considered to be most central in the interviewee's conception of political power in relation to the conflict. In the group in interviewees there was a variation in this respect. Political power was seen a a matter of settling things or as a matter of the formal political system or support and resources or as a matter of consciousness and knowledge. In our case, political power was seen as a question of settling things by decision. Two closely related but rather distinctly different conceptions were expressed. These two conceptions and the categories of description developed to represent them will be the ones primarily dealt with here. The problem focussed on concerns the relation between these two categories developed through the analysis and the interview on which they are based. The two related conceptions are the following.

1. Political power is the settling of things by decision taken as a result of being in (or having) power.

   To be in power (or to have power) means to hold a position by which the person is given the right to decide. The meaning of holding a position is quite concrete. It means to be elected chairman of a group or being the one sitting in a certian chair in a certain office.

2. Political power is the settling of things by having the last word.

   This conception refers to that issues are decided through some kind of communication. The one who has the last word "wins the discussion" and decides.

In the development of the reasoning involved here, several other conceptions of political power were also expressed. Later in this report, we shall also refer to one of these conceptions when giving an example of the relation between the interpretation of one statement and an extensive part of the whole protocol. This third conception may be summarised as follows.

3. Political power is to have a majority of experience.

   This conception contains the idea that the one or those who know most about the issues to be settled are those who are able to and who will decide.

We shall focus on these related conceptions of power as parts of the interviewee's reasoning. The first two conceptions are emphasised as those most clearly related to the actual situation referred to. Our main focus will be on the meaning of these conceptions and the validity of the categories of description used to characterise the conceptions. In particular, we shall focus on the delimitation and description of the first conception. The question adressed concerns what it is in the interviews that justifies the delimitation of these conceptions as significant parts of the reasoning that have the general meaning expressed through the categories of description. The focus is on the relation between the categories of description and the interview.

THE CHARACTER OF THE INTERVIEW

As the interview was rather extensive, it could happen that the same topic was dealt with on several occasions. The question that might then be raised was which one of those occasions best represented the true conception of the respondent. In this connection, we would like to argue that this is not a fruitful question to ask. The interview represents a constant flow of changing opinions along with the occurrence of new facts and new considerations leading to the development of new and alternative conceptions of power. It was the task of the interviewer not to stop and in some sense "conserve" established conceptions; on the contrary, the interviewer

had to constantly ask whether there were not more aspects to be considered in relation to the recently uttered conception or statement.

This constant following up and penetrating interrogation is naturally exhausting for both the respondent and the interviewer. When the replies were put together in shorter abstracts, the result was, at times, an exaggerated impression of tenseness or of an imperative atmosphere (see Theman, 1979). In most of the cases, questions asked in a leading and demanding way, were repetitions of the respondent's own earlier remarks. Put in another way, everything the respondent said was used to throw back at her or was used for questions about clarification of meaning.

Of course, this form of interview puts a mental stress on the respondent and this sometimes results in an emotional reaction. We would like to stress the necessity of keeping in contact with such reactions and to elucidate them rather than to neglect them as is often done in standard interviews. In our opinion, they are most easily treated this way, and besides, dealing with them deepens the personal contact between the participants which is good for the interview content. We shall give some examples of this from the interview treated here. In the first one, the interviewer had snapped up something that just happened to slip out. In a passage on the relation between the possibility of keeping men at work and the possibility of having one's own way, the respondent mentioned "If it's rainy weather, people stay home. So nowadays power isn't as great as before". (I is interviewer and R is respondent.)

I: What do you mean by that?

R: Oh. I shouldn't have said anything (laughing). Well, well, oh well, no (shaking her head). Pause. Well it isn't that evident ... It's not sort of ... pooh! (Pause).

I: You don't know what you mean?

R: Well, yes, in a way but (continuing)

In this excerpt, the respondent was reminded of something she had hoped would pass unnoticed. When this was not the case, she became angry signalled this by a short laugh and a moment of absentmindedness. Shortly afterwards, she continued with an explanation of the interruption. Sometimes it is very important for interpretative purposes to know about such events.

Sometimes, these more emotional events were an unintended help in a pressed situation. So is the case in the following example.

> R: But, this was one of those few issues the socialists had in common with the communists. This "no-to-the-garage" attitude.
>
> I: So you mean that it is the shared opinion that provides strength, that makes the things happen.
>
> R: Yes you could say so. (Pause). That was a good suggestion (laughter). You'll have to give me a hand a little now and then. You know, I can't find the right words!
>
> I: Well maybe, but I think you want to react yourself to what I say. What I mean is that you really feel I didn't tell you.
>
> R: No, of course not, but I must say it was very well phrased - that about "sharing opinions" I thought it was very good.
>
> (p. 31)

These comments, or rather reactions, were not always documented in the text. In as much as things really were being said, they appeared in the written protocol, but many times giggeling remarks were left out in the transscription as being meaningless material. Still, it could be important to have them included as signs of the overall climate in the interview. Used in a more interpretative way, one could say that a remark like the one above could be used for showing that the use of the term "shared opinions" objectively emerged from the interviewer, but nevertheless was subjectively totally approved of by the respondent.

THE SELECTION OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

A protocol very close to reality is only a good starting-point. In a discussion or an unstructured interview many statements are only partly expressed or contain hidden references to something having been mentioned earlier. Every reply is a reply to a question and almost every question emerges from the previous reply. Everything is connected to something else. Still, in reading the protocol one finds that there are different parts dealing with different questions and that some statements seem to address the theme involved more directly than others. This identification of parts and more significant statements is the first step in the analysis and it is deepened and revised through further analysis and interpretation.

In the interview, we aimed at revealing conceptions of political power in relation to a real political situation. The interviewee's statements referred either to that real situation or contained more abstract descriptions of the power present in the situation. The statements chosen as the starting-point for the analysis and description of conceptions of power were all of an abstract nature. The statments referring directly to the concrete aspects of the situation were used as a background against which we could test our interpretations of the meaning of the more abstract formulations. This means that our categories of description are quite close to formulations given by the interviewee. At the same time, these categories are also based on the statements concerning specific aspects of the situation.

As was described above, the situation referred to concerned the actions of the defeated parties in the recently held local elections in the municipality of Göteborg. These parties retained their executive power for a period after the election and their representatives were to resign from their posts about a month after the interview was held. The issue reasoned about was the defeated parties' action in starting the project of building the garage when they knew that their

successors were against this project. One could say that in the period between the election and the installation of the new majority there existed, at the same time, two different majorities. One old majority among the political delegates remaining in office and a new one among the electors. The main problem was in whose favour the question about the garage should be settled.

In the protocol, we found a very short sequence which addressed the issue very directly and also contained very clear indications of conceptions of political power. This judgement of these formulations was strengthened through further analysis. The central part of this sequence is the following.

> I: Well. This majority does, then, so to speak, exist. How could one then take a democratic decision against the will of the majority?
>
> R1: Yes, I also found it strange.
>
> I: Yes, how dit it work out?
>
> R2: Well, the decision came from the other side.
>
> I: How could that happen?
>
> R3: Well they saw their chance. They were in power and could take any decision.
>
> I: What kind of power did they have?
>
> R4: They were in power.
>
> I: Yes, what kind of power was that, then?
>
> R5: They had the last word, when it came to the question of money, in the town council.
>
> (p. 19)

In this quotation two statements were used as indicators of conceptions of power. But before we turn to the issue of the traceability of the meaning of those statements, we would like to say something about what the text expresses. The respondent uttered five sentences in this sequence and expressed two different conceptions of power. This means that we have interpreted the sentences R4 and R5 as having a mean-

ing of conceptions of political power. The more specific form of these conceptions are the following.

P1. To take a decision by being in power.

P2. To have the last word when it comes to the question of local government money.

We have thus changed the meaning of t[illegible] sentences slightly by incorporating the meaning of some former comments and hints given elsewhere in the text and thereby made them represent a bigger part of the interview. In this way, we have tried to identify the expressed and intended meaning attached to the single statement as given in the protocol. This interpretative process is certianly a rat'ıer delicate business and we shall in the following describe how we went about securing the meaning of our categories of description on the basis of the selected statements and their relations to the rest of the interview.

THE DELIMITATION OF PARTS OF THE INTERVIEW REPRESENTING CONCEPTIONS OF POWER

We shall start by discussing the contextual background of the two conceptions of political power that we were able to identify in the text (P1 and P2 above). The chosen sentence expressing P1 contained the wording "they were in power". This wording was closely related to "they possessed power" which was stated in the foregoing sentence. These two statements formed the background of a follow-up question which resulted in the elucidation that to be in power meant to have the last word when it came to the quesiton of local government money.

The dominant issue in the total analysis was to identify qualitatively different conceptions of political power (Theman, 1983). In that context, it was important to be able to either differentiate between the two statements or to integrate them into one conception. In the actual situation the respondent had used the phrase "to be in power" as a kind of basic statement. The elucidatory statement on deciding on the flow of

money was, from the respondent's point of view, meant to be an explication of "to be in power".

Continued analysis of these statements has, however, shown that one can attach different referential material to each of the statements and separate them as constituting different conceptions. As a result of our treatment of the respondent's two statements, we did not treat the intended meaning in the same way as the respondent herself did. The respondent said the second statement as an elucidation of the first. We have, on the contrary, interpreted this second statement as being qualitatively different from the first. It is in line with our overall experience of interviewing, that respondents, being anxious to clarify themselves when being questioned, deliberately strain themselves to find an additional description when they detect some invalidity or insufficiency with the ones already expressed. We find that it is common to use different conceptions in order to accomplish the goal of a full treatment of the issue.

We shall now proceed with a clarification of the identification of the difference in conception behind the small but important difference on the level of wording. Our introductory quotation appeared in page 19 of the protocol. We also found some remarks earlier in the interview to be of relevance.

> R: Yes, it was in the campaign then. There it started - and the socialists they said. If we <u>come to power</u>, then we won't continue that garage business
>
> (p. 1)
>
> R. I saw this as something positive, because ... But, as I didn't want a garage, the right <u>party</u>, if you could say so, <u>got the power</u>.
>
> (p. 2)
>
> R: Well, I think they must have taken some kind of decision, as it started up. And that began already before the election, that means before the <u>shift in power</u>.
>
> (p. 4)

In this part of the interview, it was obvious that R meant power to be equivalent to having a majority position in the politically established local council. The different expressions used, "get the power, come to power, the shift in power" are all rather unproblematic on a colloquial level, but when the more exact meaning of statements like these are to be specified, problems arise. "To get the power" had a meaning not far from to "have one's own way through" which was attributed to "the people".

> R: Well, the people didn't want to have it. As you could see from the change of government.
>
> (p. 4)

Here R replaced the phrase "change of power" with the obviously synonymous "change of government". "To get power" would thus safely be regarded as having the meaning of "to be seated in the position of government". It was considered as a detail of minor importance that R used the phrase "government" instead of the proper "local government" though there is, in the swedish language, a strict difference betseen these terms due to a real difference with respect to the execution of national authority and the execution of local authority. Possibly, it could make sense to conclude that R conceived of the local council majority as having the same rights in form of executive power as the government of the country, but that is not important here.

"To have one's own way", is thus closely related to P1 "to be in power". At the same time, it seems to be closely related to P2, "to have the last word about money". How, then, can P1 and P2 be separated? The opportunity to do this was based on a comparison between an earlier and a later passage in the interviewexcerpt on p. 19. The earlier passage was:

> R: Well, they saw their chance to do it. They were in power and could take any decision.
>
> R: They were (placed) in power.

The later passage:

> I: But, power in this sense then. What does it mean really? You called it power to have the last word?
>
> R: Yes, they've been able to say how things should be by ruling and bossing people as it pleased them. But nowadays things are different. (everyone is to join in the decision-making.) And that's no good either.

In relation to the latter passage, the sentence "could take any decision" from the former passage, could be interpreted as meaning "to do as one wishes" or "to have one's own way". This could be seen in contrast to the interpretation of being in power as meaning having a position in a system. To decide as one wished here meant to decide in an undemocratic way without paying attention to others. To decide as a result of being in power meant to decide as the formal system suggested, i.e. in this case, according to the will of the people as expressed in the election (or by representing the present majority). Thus, P2 belongs to a group of statements referring to an undemocratic power. In the context of the interviewee's reasoning, this meaning of P2 distinguishes it from P1, which concerns the general democratic nature of political power in a democratic system. There is another difference in meaning between P1 and P2 which makes the one between democratic and undemocratic power possible. This is the difference between referring to a position and referring to the actions of an individual or group. We take this to be the more fundamental difference between the two related conceptions of political power. It is the action of "having the last word" that is the central meaning of P2 as opposed to the "being in power" of P1.

When we separate the two conceptions we expect R to stick to them and the difference between them for the rest of the interview. Whenever R intended to express power as being something you concretely possess as a right to decide, R should only have access to one way of expressing this, namely the conception of power as "being (placed) in power". Having

arrived at such a conclusive definition of the meaning of a conception through the content of the respondent's statements, one could also define a natural beginning and end of the passage to be qucted as expressing the conception. The respondent should have reached a point where either the same conception started to be repeated or a qualitatively different conception emerged.

If the analysis was correctly made, the meaning of a conception should remain constant in different parts of the interview and thus, one must be very observant of true changes in the conception, e.g. that a new context was used to underline or evaluate the meaning differently. What we meant by having a conception stay constant in a different part or context was simply that the context was used to strengthen the former interpretation of the phenomenon as it had been expressed in the conception. We remind the reader that we, by the same type of reasoning, earlier executed the opposite move. We identified one of the respondent's own elucidations as being a qualitatively different conception and not an elucidation of the former meaning (p.13). What we would like to stress is the possibility of checking the validity of the delimitation of conceptions by further comparisons within the protocol.

In our case, this possibility turned up a few pages later in the text.

> R: Not if you are in power somehow.
>
> I: What do you mean by power then?
>
> R: I don't know how to explain this.
> ...
> It could be like a very good football player. Or someone who is at the top in his sport. Best man on the team. He then has a kind of majority all the time. Everyone admires him, and people expects him to do their things (=to fullfill their wishes).
>
> (p.23)

In this context, the phrase "to be in power" was explained by a rather mixed analogy with a sportsman. To be in power meant

to be in a top position on the team. This, on the other hand, was based on "a majority of admiration" to which was connected a lot of expectations. In this analogy, one can see how one conception of power (P1) was being used with a constant meaning in a new context. However, in the new context, the conception includes new elements. These elements concern the relation between having a majority and being in a top position. These elements are admiration and expectations. They provide a further link between the top position corresponding to P1 and the activity corresponding to P2.

The new conception provides a better grasp of the domination by others in certain situations. In an interview of considerable length, it is very likely that some kind of progress in the respondent's handling of the issue involved occurs. This means that as a result of better articulation of conceptions, or a different combination of conceptions, the individual expresses an increasingly better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. What seems to be involved here is an organizational activity carried out by the individual in relation to his world. A progress in the form of an extension to other conceptions and/or in the form of a better organization of relations between conceptions may be expected. This should not be confused with the transformation of meaning given to a specific statement when a contextual replacement occurs. The task for a contextual analysis of statements is thus to identify the meaning behind the single statement in such a way that it defines a certain characteristic of the relation between the individual and the phenomena in the individuals' lived reality.

THE RELATION OF SIGNIFICANT PARTS TO THE WHOLE PROTOCOL

The quotation started from above (p. 11) represented a natural sequence in the protocol. Some other quotations were aggregates of disparate statements from different parts of the interview. The main reason for quoting a natural sequence was, of course, to convey the direct context of the chosen sentence. This was, however, not sufficient to stabi-

lize the meaning connected with the statement and represented by the category P1. In order to reach this level of meaning, one had to search through the other parts of the protocol for reference, as we have already illustrated.

In the interviews many things and topics were mentioned at many occasions during the interview. People tended to return to old topics. While doing this it often occurred that irrelevant material was touched on, and the protocols often contained exchanges that seemed rather redundant. In some of these redundant passages, however, some important subconcepts were developed. Sometimes, interpretations could be more firmly based by referring to those exchanges.

The problem with this phenomenon, as it typically appeared in our unstructured interviews, was how one should try afterwards to determine the borders of relevance. What should be counted as belonging to the question under scrutiny and what should be left out? In the oral situation, most of the replies seemed to be relevant, and those which departed from the subject, were often very soon forgotten and played no role in the rest of the interview. In the transcribed version, however, all material tends to appear, with equal internal value, to represent pure content. This circumstance could be rather bewildering at times and in order to avoid too strong personal frustration it might be beneficial to condense the main ideas by omitting the redundant material. In the following, we shall describe how this could be done.

The first excerpt presented above had the following content. The respondent had developed the conception of power as "being (placed) in power". While trying to articulate this, R mentioned a new conception of power with the meaning of power being to have the last word when it came to the control of the flow of money. While searching for a deeper meaning of this conception, or maybe searching for the meaning of both, the respondent developed a rather circumstantial form of argumentation which took on an analogous character, similar to the analogy with a fotball player described above.

The problem to be solved could be described as follows.

> Political power was described as "to be in power" and "to have the last word about money" and "to take a decision" and "to have one's own way".

In order to solve this, the respondent made a comparison between herself as a voting citizen in the polls and the ruling politicians and her role as an employee and the "boss" of the company. The common idea was that both these figures (politician and boss) had an absolute right to govern and to make decisions. Thus, the political concept of majority was combined with the authority of a boss in terms of amount of branch experience.

The analogous discussion ran over four pages of transcription and ended with the expression of the following conception of power:

> P3. The one being the most experienced, has a kind of majority, or power. He is the one who knows what things lead to.

This conception started off with the respondent pointing to the hierarchical bases of power. (You have to turn to the one being highest). Thereafter R made some vague reflections on the relation between power, majority, having the last word, and deciding.

> R: Well, how he becomes the majority. Of course, he's, of course, he's the one who has the power, like,
>
> I: Does that make him the majority?
>
> R: Well, yes.
>
> I: In what way, then?
>
> R: Because he's the one who makes the final decision about everything, you see.
>
> I: Hm.
>
> R: And that's because he is the power when he becomes the majority.

(p.22)

This argumentation seemed to be circular in character. This was, however, not necessarily the case. R managed, though with some difficulty, to separate "deciding" from "majority" as can be seen in the following interview excerpt. In this excerpt, the major arguments have been underlined and numbered from 1 to 13 in the left hand margin. The sentences, chosen to make up the final abstract have been indicated by the blockletters A to E.

We would like to demonstrate two aspects of the analytical procedure with this lengthy quotation. First, though the reasoning and the arguments given, are rather blurred, there is a posibility of selecting main components in terms of cue sentences, and arranging them in such an order that the main line of the respondents thinking is retained. This is done and presented in the abstract. Please observe the slightly changed order of the cue sentences. This had to be done to accomplish a reasonably good picture of the respondents' ideas. Secondly, it is very important to try to understand the respondents' intended meaning of certain words or statements. In this case, there was a bewildering mix of the words "majority" and being "the highest", being the one "outnumbering the rest", and the meaning attached to all these in terms of having a right to decide and thus being in power.

At the beginning of the excerpt, the very special interconnections between "having the last word" and "being in power" were hidden, maybe even from the respondent herself. At the end of the excerpt, there was a possibility of connecting the thesis about the boss's right to decide with the politician's right to decide as a result of having a majority. It was this statement that enlightened some of the crucial concepts for the respondent which, in turn, lead to the expression of a new conception of power. (Excerpt from pp. 20-23.)

I: The last word, is that what power is?

R: Hm.

I: Can you say more about it?

R: Yes. Let's see, it's like here, I'm running here, before I dare to say how it is, so I have to come
1. to the point that I dare to say how it is, I have to go to the one who is at the top to get that decision, I never get it at other - well, I get it to a certain point, of course, but never, sort of, when it's a matter of some money.

I: Hm. What do you do, then, when you go to the one at the top, you said, what does that mean?

R: Well, I suppose I'd have to first go to the man who is a director of the company here in town.

I: Ye-es.

R: And then I,d say it and he'd say yes, hm, and thanks that's good. If he says no, then it's often something else.

I: Hm.

R: Bluffing and cheating behind it all.

I: Hm.

R: One shouldn't really work at that sort of place ha ha ha, but I like it very much so ha ha ha (hearty laughter). No, but I ...

I: But power in this sense. What does it mean, then, the last word you said?

2. R: Yes, they have said how things are going to be, doing as they wish and now it's exactly the opposite and that's not so good either, but naturally if -
3. well, it is the majority that must decide.

I: Hm.

4. R: So that things can't be like everybody wants them to be, naturally one has to look to the majority.

I: Hm. Why does one have to do that?

R: Because nothing would get done if there had been, if everybody had to take into account - or that is take into account everybody's opinion, then nothing would get done, then one wouldn't have been able to decide on either one or the other, then 25% there would have wanted to have things, and 30% would have wanted things to be sort of in one way, you see, so they have to follow majority decisions, that's how it is with everything.

I: But in that case - otherwise nothing would happen if one didn't have this principle.

R: No-o, exactly.

I: Because it is a principle, I suppose. That's how I feel you're expressing it.

R: Ye-es, yes, I suppose that's the case with everything, it's not only in ... (mumbles)

5. I: So the one who is the highest, he's in a majority over you?

R: Hm.

I: How does he get to be that?

R: Yes, because I myself don't take those decisions which I ...

I: But how does he become a majority over you? It is a he, isn't it, we're quite clear about that.

R: Hm, hm.

I: Yes.

R: Well, how he becomes the majority. Of course, he's, of course, he's the one who has the power, like,

I: Does that make him the majority?

R: Well, yes.

I: In what way, then?

6. R: Because he's the one who makes the final decision about everything, you see.

I: Hm.

R: And that's because he is the power when he becomes the majority.

I: But does he then become a majority over you?

R: I don't know about majority - yes but - no he becomes the power, you see. Majority doesn't mean the same as power in this case.

I: No, exactly, because I thought you said that power comes via the majority. It's the majority that decides, but still we had talked earlier about this business that 'he has the last word', you said, or 'he has the power' you started by saying and then you said it was the last word and so I'd like to hear how you fit in this business about it being the majority providing the power. In that case, he has a majority over you in some sense, and what does it look like?

7. R: I don't know whether I can make that comparison just in this case, you see, but in the case of local politics I think one can put it that way.

I: Yes, but in this case what sort of power is it, what sort of - what is the power. Clearly, it's not the majority, is it something else?

8. R: C Ye-es, people listen to him, he's the one who knows everyone as it were and he's the one who knows, sort of, how many there are back and what happens if one takes that kind of decision, as it were. And so on. Very often he thinks for people, as it were, because he's still very often the one who knows what different things lead to.

I: Hm.

R: It's just that it's a pity there is one. There should be more, there must be a certain, not
9. A everybody can sit there and say that they should do this and that. There must be someone - who sees the direction in which everything is going, B you see, like some people or someone who knows about things. Not everybody is as familiar with things.

I: Hmm.

R: D And the one who is made a director, who started - at least reached - started at the bottom, he
10. knows an immense - from experience, the one who has the experience, the most experience, I suppose one can say, has a majority or power.

I: Hm.

11. R: One could say so, I suppose.

12. I: E So he has the experience - it can, as it were, be a sort of majority related to your experience.

13. R: Hm.

We do not intend to comment further on the thirteen main sentences, but proceed with the construction of the condensed abstract forming the immediate context to the power statement P3 (the one having the most experience has the power). In a way, the P3-power conception was a variant of the very well-known motto: "knowledge is power" but in this context it would not be advisable to ascribe P3 this meaning too quickly.

The abstract forming the background and immediate context of the conception of power P3: To have the most experience is to have power, was formed as follows.

^{8}R : ^{A}There must be someone who ... ^{B}not everyone is equally familiar with things. ^{C}People listen to him, he's the one who knows everyone, as it were, and he's the one who knows, sort of, how how many there are back and what happens if one takes that kind of decision, as it were. And so on. Very often he thinks for people, and it were, because he's still very often the one who knows what different things lead to.

^{10}R: ^{D}And the one who is made a director, who started - at least reached - started at the bottom, he knows an immense - from experience. The one who has the experience, the most experience, I suppose one can say, has a majority or power.

^{12}I: ^{E}So he has the experience - it can, as it were, be a sort of majority related to your experience.

^{13}R : One could put it that way.

The abstract was combined by the different but closely related parts from the interview, in such a way as to convey a certain meaning, the conception P3.

It should be observed that the order of the parts A to E have been slightly altered in the abstract as compared with the natural order in the protocol. The reason for this was simply that we wanted to explicate the main point in C with the repetitions done in A and B forming background. The points made in A could be found earlier in the text (main sentences 1-6). By placing B in front of C, the same point made in C was strengthened. Thus, A+B+C then formed the background for D, the part which holds the central details of the meaning of the conception P3.

Part E contained a sort of confirmatory statement. Unluckily, this statement came from the interviewer. The respondent's own confirmation was a combination of the final sentence in D and the assenting comment in the reply. Again, we changed the order between replies in the transformation from protocol to abstract. In this case, this was due to the fact that the respondent's real assenting answer took the form of a "hm" (main sentence 13). This is a good example of the point made later in this report, that "hm" or something similar could take on a real meaning. In this case, the "hm" in sentence 13 meant "yes" and this in turn was a confirmation of the "you could say so" in main sentence 11. In order to retain a good narrative structure of the abstract the sentences 11 and 12 changed positions.

After the quoted part of the protocol, the interview continued with fresh statements about power. The point of "amount of experience" was thus developed and turned into a conception of power meaning a "somehow free position to negotiate". As this conception was clearly different from the one referring to "most experience", it became natural to stop the search for referential evidence of P3 beyond the reply in main sentence 13.

The power of the boss in this description is related to a position in a way similar to that of the politicians and the top sportsman. However, in the present case the basis for, the nature of and the implementation of that power are interrelated through the common element of experience. Thus, this analogy emphasises a common basis for "to be in power" and to "have the last word" rather than makes a distinction between the two. What the analogous meaning in the case of political power would be is not dealt with by the interviewee. This leaves us with the three different conceptions of P1, P2 and P3.

THE WRITTEN AND THE SPOKEN WORD

There is a fundamental difference between the spoken and the written language. An written expression cannot possibly contain the full flavor of the interview experience. The conditions for understanding are different from spoken language in the actual situation as compared with written language in the reading situation. Paul Ricoeur (1971), in arguing for the importance of this difference, referred to the work of W. Dilthey.

> Whereas 'verstehen' (understanding, comprehension) relies on the recognition of what a foreign subject means or intends on the basis of all kinds of signs in which psychic life expresses itself. 'Lebens ausserungen, Auslegen' (interpretation, exegesis) implies something more specific; it covers only a limited category of signs, those which are fixed by writing, including all the sorts of documents and monuments which entail a fixation similar to writing.
> (Ricoeur, 1971 p. 529)

Thus, when you express the content of a conversation by means of a text, you reduce the meaning of the spoken word. In line with the theories of Edmund Husserl (1900/1901), one could say that you only succeed in retaining the noematic aspect. In order to understand a text you would then have to recreate its ideal subjective meaning-structure, the noetic aspect of the spoken word. Such is the basis for interpretative activity which gives it its living and flexible character. To interpret a text is to undertand the meaning expressed by the text. In the situation where the text is an interview protocol, there has existed an interview and a face-to-face encounter. In one sense, one could refer to this as the reality of the text. Sometimes you can reveal parts of this reality by "reading between the lines" in the text. It is possible to conclude from the, unfinished sentences, stammering etc the existence of threat, nuisance, love and excitement between the participants. This in turn could be used in order to better understand a cryptic passage in the text.

In order to make such a detailed analysis, you have to be very cetain that your text corresponds to what really was being said in the actual situation. The only way to check this is to carefully correct the transcription by listening to the tape. In the following, we shall mention some of the errors which were common in the first draft of the present protocol.

ERRORS IN THE TRANSCRIPTION

In the first excerpt presented above (p.11), the full sentence R3 was originally written like this:

> Well, they saw their chance to take a decision on it, they were in power then and could take on any decision then those guys.

The first action to be taken was to arrange the transscribed text so that it was more in line with the spoken punctuation. The excerpt then looked like this:

> Well, they saw their chance to take a decision, on it. They were in power and could take on any decision. Then. Those guys.

In this version, it could be seen there had been a clear pause in the middle of the utterance, and that in the first version the final comment on "those guys" lost the special weight given to it. These differences might not appear revolutionary but the reference of the final comment did change a bit.

The expression "then those guys" could be taken for a very common colloquial repetition, meaning simply a strengthening of the phrase "They saw their chance ..." But the correction made it more clear that the last line could have another meaning. "Then" was an indication pointing to a special moment in time. Namely, the time of the decision taken by the political majority in power. "Those guys" should then be read: "<u>Those</u> guys" and being sen as in indicator of the dif-

ference between the decision-taking right wing politicians and the subject's favorite group: the leftwing politicians.

One could object to this detailed sort of analysis and say that it really does not matter in the long run. We would argue that the corrected transcription had a distinctively different character. In the first place, one could read the utterance as having a typical colloquial structure but, by means of a slight rearrangement, it could be shown to have a rather distinct referential structure. The subject had more in mind then what had been immediately expressed. What was in the subject's mind could be identified by help of the previous dialogue where a distinction was made. The subject named the socialist bloc as the "majority" and the conservative bloc as "those who decided". Thereby indicating the unjust art of the actual circumstances.

R: They'll do it because all their supporters have the same opinion in most ... They are selfish. Selfish, that's what they are. Ugh!
...
Well, you must errase. I'm awful. But I feel like this, you know.

I: Well, yes. All right. This group in the market place, those who acted, you mentioned before that they acted in defence of the will of the majority? Is there something contradictory in that, in relation to the selfishness of those other politicians you just mentioned.

R: Well not really cause they want, the majority of their will. They want it their way of course ... They want it their way of course ... But they[1] are not themselves, they are not ... Well, they[1] don't think so much of their own good. They think of their neighbour next door, and their sisters and brothers. The other[2] they don't do that. They only think of themselves as a majority. Uh. As a group, not as a single person. The decision came from the other side.

These comments somewhat enlightened the situation. The "those guys" comment obviously referred to the "selfish conservatives" as distinct from the "loyal socialists". One could

---

[1] left wing [2] right wing

even arrive at a wider interpretation of this, letting the expression "those guys" take on the intentional meaning: "such selfish creeps who only care for themselves and decide without any consideration for their brothers and sisters".

Still another example of how the transformation from tape to paper could lead to a slightly altered appearance was the case where simple acknowledging "hm's" were typed as if they had the status of being single statements. What, in reality, was a monologue by the respondent could appear as a dialogue in the transscribed form.

R: No they have to do as the majority wants.

I: What majority?

R: The local inhabitants. The people in the local ...

I: Hm.

R: The majority in the municipality, they did not ...

I: So, you say.

R: Yes the people. They didn't want it as you know from the election held recently.

I. Hm.

R: And if that's the case, then they should't go ahead and do what they want. And continue, when the people didn't want it. Eh?

What happened after the first question put by I was simply a kind of searching answer from R with small interventions from I in order to bring it to a conclusion. The content was mainly the same but R wanted to express a feeling of being indignant at the mere fact that the politicians were being obstructive. In other instances, the "hm's" could take on a meaning of either negating or agreeing to a previous statement. Sometimes this is written in a different form to what was actually said. A questioning "hmm" could be

written as "hm". A "hm" could, in fact, cover a rather clearly asserting (yes). This must be very clearly observed and marked in the written protocol. For interpretative purposes, it is very important to know if a "hm" has the character of being a negation, a "let's wait and see", a "yes indeed" or just an interruptive, continuing remark.

Another kind of transcriptive error consisted of coding errors while listening to the tape. The phrase R2 (p. 11):

> The decision came from the other side

was originally transcribed as

> The decision came from another side.

Indeed a minor difference but the final form suggested that the respondent actually knew about and was referring to a certain dichotomy, i.e. the one between left- and right wing blocs in politics.

In another case, this kind of error led to more profound effects on the statement. In the following example, the previous discussion had been about what might have happened if the political parties had not acted as they did. A kind of hypothetical questioning.

First version:

> R: Well ... Many people, who don't have distinct opinions. They thought:"Dash it. Those socialist can't do it." and instead thought:"They'll make loaves out of it . We don't trust it anymore".

Corrected version:

> R: Well ... Many people, who don't have distinct opinions. They thought: "Dash it. Those socialists can't make it." and instead thought: "What kind of oafs are they? We won't trust them anymore".

This correction revealed two different errors. The first concerned, what could be done and the second what was not

being trusted, anymore. In the first version, the Socialists were expected not to be able to do it (prevent the building of the garage) and to make "loaf" of it (presumably, if interpreted in this way, an expression for making something messy out of the question). This making was not trusted anymore. In the second, corrected, version it was said that many people expressed some kind of disgust by calling the socialists "oafs". In this case, the socialists clearly were the distrusted party in question. Apart from the fact that this later interpretation makes much more sense, the correction could be supported by reference to some following sentences.

R: They don't seem to know how they want to have it.

R: If so, there they could have lost some of their supporters and thus the power.

In these sentences "they" referred to the socialists and the risk they were running if people distrusted their will to prevent the building of the garage. The most apparent danger with mishearing in this way is that it could result in faulty but not impossible sentences. People do express themselves in many strange ways and many times the interpreter finds himself involved in trying to understand what the respondent really did hint at where he should be checking up whether the text had been correctly transcribed from the tape or not.

A practice which can have long-ranging effects on the meaning of the written version of the originally spoken message is a correction of the colloquial character of the message. It can lead to a reduction of meaning, of importance for the interpretative procedure. In the following case there was an obvious need for a correction of the original text, though in doing so a highly important quality of the utterance was lost.

I: Hm, hm. But how ... when did you realize that it had, after all, been decided to build a garage?

R: Yes, that is exactly what I have'nt found out. You see, it is just that descision there you know, I don't know if just that was, that it was taken, just the decision decided upon. Do you mean that or ...?

In a "reduced" form, the above exchange could be given the following form.

I: When did you realize that there was a decision taken to build a garage?

R: Yes that's exactly what I can't find out. I don't know that that decision was being taken.

The utterances still contained some indistinct elements, but now they merely belonged to the unclear meaning of the expression rather than to the vague expressional form. Treated in this way, you can gain in distinctiveness with respect to the central content of the utterance and in the readability of the text. This technique is, however, seductive and thus slightly dubious. You lose the very clearly expressed uncertainty in the respondent's utterances which, if used properly, could lead to an increase of possible new exits such as: What did R knew about the decision? What was the fact R had not found out? Why was R worried by the experience of not having complete knowledge?

In fact, it emerged that there existed fairly good answers to all three questions, and that by answering them, one gained very much in understanding the respondent's way of thinking. In this very special case it also had a bearing on our special task, the analysis of the statements P1 and P2 on power. The quotation given as a first example of a significant statement (p. 11) served, as a matter of fact, as the respondent's answer to the questions underlying the observed insecurity. The main issue in the respondent's uncer-

tainty was wether one really could make a democratic decision against the will of the majority of the people, or, if a decision was made, how this decision could be democratic. The impossibility of fully grasping this was a distinct part of the respondent's relation to the event.

> R: Yes, exactly. And then I considered that to be wrong. Cause they had, as I saw it, staged a coup, as the papers called it. They had planned this so as to ... The conservatives had planned this to make it impossible for the socialists to prevent this garage, eh.

The respondent's insight into the political fight about the erection or not of the garage was described as an internal quarrel between the parties, leaving the respondent as an outsider. R remained a spectator and was never really involved.

> R: No I don't know how it all came about. I've never thought of that ... I thought they concluded: All right there's nothing to argue about anymore. If they want to have the garage, let'em have it. They'll pay the consequences sooner or later.
> ...
> If there had been a garage built. All right I would have thought. It's a pity but what has happened has happened. I would never go down there to do something about it. Protest or something. Never.

THE GENERAL APPROACH

At the beginning of this report, we referred to several studies carried out within our research group which include descriptions of conceptions. They are not the only studies of this kind carried out within the group, but are the ones published in our series of monographs at the institute. In relation to our total work on describing conceptions, the case we have used here as an example has some specific characteristics not shared with many of the other studies.

We shall first describe the methodology generally and then what is more specific to the present case. In this way, we hope to clarify by means of the case as an example our general methodological approach.

Categories of description

Our emphasis on the need to consider form and content in relation to each other is closely related to a general methodological concern. This is the concern for generalisation and for creating a valid basis for generalisation. Emphasis on the general forms of conceptions is usually combined with a concern for generalisation. Our emphasis on describing form and content in relation to each other is not due to lack of interest in generalisations but rather because we wish to avoid superficial generalisations and overgeneralisations. The aim of both attaining generality and validity seems to be best met by descriptions in the form of categories. The categories referred to do not represent categories of observation, which form the basis for data collection and analysis. They represent the result of the investigation and may be given before the investigation only in the form of hypotheses about the results. The categories of description represent the crucial relation between theory and empirical data. In a general form, they represent theoretical concepts and in the context of the specific case they represent empirical results. Thus, a category of description is used to clarify the relation between theory and empiri.

To describe conceptions in the form of categories may not seem very important in relation to the individual case. However, it places some demands on the analysis with regard to arriving at what the most fundamental characteristics of the conceptions are, what the main parts are and how they are related. This could also be done in a more generally descriptive way as a part of presenting the richness of the empirical data. From our perspective, the richer the data collection and the greater the amount of data that can be

presented the better. However, very descriptive presentations of results often reveal a lack of analysis, which is more problematic the richer the material is. Aiming at descriptions in the form of categories of description serves as a request to take the analysis one step further and to make explicit the main character of the conceptions.

The categories of description represent a more abstract level of description compared to extensive descriptive presentations of the specific content of the conceptions. It is more abstract in three senses of the word; it is selective, summarising and organising. It is abstracting rather than merely abstract since the description has the character of selecting and organising the data and not merely describing the content of the data on a more general or abstract level. The aim is not to describe the data in more general or abstract terms but to differentiate, group and interrelate data and then characterize the result in the form of categories of description.

The categories represent abstract descriptions of the conceptions. They include the main, common organisation of the content of the conceptions grouped in the category. These two characteristics of the descriptions provide the basis for generalisation and for the theoretical function of the categories. Comparisons between conceptions grouped in the same category and comparisons between conceptions belonging to different categories illuminate the validity of the categories and make it possible to improve the generalisations. This is fundamental to the development of theory and also to the program of phenomenography referred to above. The aim of describing conceptions in terms of categories of descriptions constitutes a guideline for the analysis of data. It implies a differentiation between the results of the analysis on one hand and the data on the other hand.

A category of description has a theoretical and an empirical function; it mediates the relation to thinking and research

in other contexts and it summarizes empirical results. The delimitation of the general meaning of a category is related to the question of what is a fruitful way of grouping conceptions and thus to the question of alternative conceptions of the same or similar phenomena. There are two bases on which to rest the delimitation: the variation of conceptions in the immediate study and similar research presented in the literature. Anchoring the delimitation of individual conceptions firmly in the variation within a study is fundamental in a cumulative development of descriptions. This depends on the contextual and relational character of conceptions. A crucial question then concerns the relation between a category of description and the data and how the categories are formed through the analysis of data.

Contextual analysis

From the relational nature of conceptions it follows that what is to be described as a conception is not everything done or said during a certain period of time or in a certain situation, but a relation between an individual and a part of the world. The conception has to be described on the basis of a manifestation of such a relation. However, individuals change in their relation to the surrounding world and if one is interested in the relation to a specific part of the world it is very inefficient to wait for the individual to manifest the relation spontaneously. Descriptions of conceptions usually refer to situations especially designed to establish a manifestation of the relation of interest. Interview situations are especially relevant for establishing and maintaining such manifestations.

The dependence of descriptions of conceptions upon manifestations in specific situations leads to several questions concerning the limitations of the results. One such question concerns the generality of the results in terms of how stable the individual is in his conception across situations and over time. This question has to be answered from case to case on the basis of the nature of the conception and available information about this kind of generality. It

is important to recognise, however, that the descriptions as such may be valid irrespective of if the individual changes or not. In fact they ought to be so in order to be able to provide a basis for describing the stability and change of the individual. A description may be very generally valid but for different individuals on different occasions. Thus, they may be generally held although the individuals vary in their conceptions.

What has been concluded above, starting from the relational nature of conceptions, also applies in an interview situation. Not everything said in the interview or a part of the interview is relevant or equally relevant in describing conceptions. This makes an analytic approach to the interview protocol neccessary. The situation excludes a basing of the descriptions on the formulations in the interview in a more synthetic way, comprising the statements in the interview into a summary description. Such an approach would presuppose that the whole interview was about one conception and also that all statements were equally important in revealing the conception. This is certainly not the case and consequently an analytic approach is favored. This general approach, which we have called contextual analysis, has been described and argued for by Svensson (1976). He concludes: "A contextual analysis, then, must not only mean an aggregation of specific data with generally given interpretations, but a delimitation of specific data related to each other as aspects of the same phenomena (p. 188).

In aiming at descriptions of conceptions in the form of categories and in achieving this result by means of contextual analysis, a differentiation of the conceptions from the formulations in the interview is created. That this is done contextually means that it is not based on an algorithmic division, selection and combination of parts but on an interpretation of the meaning of parts in their context. Svensson (1978) discussed the need to differentiate thought and language in investigating the relation between them. In the present context, this relation is essential and needs some clarification. The categories of description arrived at are based on the formulations in the interview and are

still said to be differentiated and partly independent of these formulations.

The basis for differentiating thought and language, and conceptions and formulations in the interview, is to be found in the content of what is said in the interview. The content is, then, not primarily considered in terms of meanings of linguistic units, but from the point of view of expressing a relation to parts of the world. Furthermore, fundamental characteristics of this relation are focussed on. This makes the specific forms of language used, although the basis of the analysis, subordinate to their expressed content. What counts as the "same" conception may be expressed in many linguistically very different ways and what counts as different conceptions may be expressed in a very similar language.

Language is, in itself, a social reality. Expressing conceptions may have the character of describing the meaning of a word in a language as understood by the individual. It might also be a relation mainly to a part of the rest of the world rather than to a word, but have the character of expressing what the individual thinks is the commonly accepted conception. More genuine conceptions will be most clearly revealed in manifestations of a direct relation to some specific part of the world which the conception is taken to be a conception of. It is such manifestations of conceptions that are the starting point for most of our analyses of conceptions. This means that the most interesting and fundamental characteristics of the conceptions tend to be manifested as implicit assumptions or a perspective expressed through dealing with the specifics of the phenomena rather than through direct formulations. This makes the differentiation of the conceptions and the categories of description from the formulations of the interview protocol still more neccessary.

It is important to realize that the general description of a conception in terms of a category does not stand by it-

self. We aim at differentiating the general to be able to find it in the concrete not to separate it from the concrete as something in and by itself. This means that we have to consider descriptions of individual cases, not only as a basis for clarifying the meaning of the general category but also as important in itself. This is so from the perspective of generalisation and use of the categories of description. The more extensively the role of the general in the specific case is described, the better is the validity and the basis for generalisation and theory development.

THE SPECIFIC CASE AND THE GENERAL APPROACH

The case belongs to the most extensive and unstructured kind of interviews we have carried out. This makes it well suited to reveal certain problems also present in the analyses of the less extensive and more structured interviews. The interview, although rather unstructured, is clearly directed like all of our interviews. Throughout the interview, the interviewer directs the interviewee towards the phenomena and issues of interest to the investigation. However, this is not done in the form of a set of questions given in advance. In many of our investigations, there is a more general prestructuring concerning what phenomena or aspects to talk about and in what order. Questions introducing new phenomena or aspects are also given in advance, while follow-up questions are formulated on the basis of the answers given by the interviewees. Thus, one can say that the interviews vary as to how many ordered themes they contain, represented by an introductory question formulated in advance, and how extensively the themes are treated by the use of follow-up questions.

There is a difference between the present case and the more prestructured interviews in that in the latter the delimitation of the main parts of the interview is very much determined by the structure. In the present case, what constituted parts had to be discovered by means of the interviewee's way of presenting the political situation and by

means of the following analysis of the protocol. On the basis of the analysis, different statements were thus grouped together. However, we would like to stress that it is, in our view, the same problem, in principle, also in the case of more prestructured interviews. Although much of the grouping of statements may be expected to be roughly determined by the prestructuring, in terms of topics and interview format, they still remains to be validated by means of the analysis of the content. Thus, we do not consider those parts which seem to be given through the prestructuring, to automatically constitute relevant parts of the interview, representing conceptions. The conceptions are always to be found by carrying out the same kind of analysis as we have described for the present case, i.e. on the basis of the content of the statements.

In most of our studies, the focus has been on a certain phenomenon or message delimited and conceptualised by the interviewee. Our concern has then been with the conception of the phenomenon or message as a whole and in terms of how the phenomenon or message appears to the interviewee. In the present case, this would correspond to the conception of the political situation referred to or some part of this situation as a whole. However, in the present study, our concern is less with the conception of the concrete situation per se and more with the interviewee's manifestation of conceptions of power in relation to the situation. The focus is on the individual side of the relation between the individual and the phenomenon and the concern is with a certain general aspect of how the individual relates himself to the situation - the aspect of political power. The conceptions of political power represent expressed relations to different parts and aspects of the political situation thought about, but not directly to the whole situation. This is why we, in this investigation, describe the interviewee's reasoning in terms of several conceptions rather than one integrated conception of the phenomenon.

The different conceptions of political power expressed by the same interviewee definitely are interrelated. A description of relations between different conceptions could be done in two ways. One is through the reference to different aspects or parts of the corresponding external situation and the relation between those aspects and parts. The other is the internal relations between the conceptions in the context of the thinking of the individual. Here, we have not emphasised the relations between the different conceptions, but the different conceptions per se. In this study, the conceptions represent the fundamental entities. They represent some manifestations of the interviewee's relation to the phenomena of political power. We would like to stress that it is the meaning, the intentional act, as expressed through the separate manifestations, that constitutes the conceptions of power in the most genuine sense, as a relation between the individual and the world.

The focus on different manifestations of conceptions of power rather than on the conception of one case of political power as a whole, is related to another characteristic of the present description of conceptions. It is that the very descriptions of the conceptions (the categories) are very close to certain formulations in the interview. This is not generally the case in our investigations. When the focus has been on the conception of one phenomenon as a whole, the formulations of the categories of description have sometimes been very different from some of the statements considered to constitute the categories. This is especially so when what is described as a conception is not directly expressed by the interviewees but has the character of perspectives and/or fundamental assumptions expressed indirectly throughout their reasoning.

Thus, the starting point in the present analysis was manifestations of conceptions rather than a conceptualised phenomenon, as in most of our studies. The main character of the analysis, however, is the same. On the basis of the statements, parts of the interview representing the con-

ception must be delimited. In studies focusing on fairly extensive phenomena, the problems discussed here in terms of differentiation of different related conceptions (like conceptions 1 and 2) have their correspondence more in differentiations within the same conception of parts making up a more complex conception. In some studies, the conception as a product or result is differentiated from the activity through which the conception is developed and/or expressed. In different cases, we take a similar analytical approach based on interpretation i.e. the approach of contextual analysis.

REFERENCES

Dahlgren, L.O. Qualitative differences in learning as a function of content-oriented guidance. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1975.

Husserl, E. (Logische Untersuchungen, 1900/1901) Logical Investigation. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

Lybeck, L. Arkimedes i klassen. En ämnespedagogisk berättelse. (Archimedes in the class-room. A subject educational narrative.) Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1981.

Marton, F. Phenomenography - Describing conceptions of the world around us. Instructional Science, 1981, 10, 177-200.

Ricoeur, P. The model of the text. Meaningful action considered as a text. Social research, 1971, 38, 529-562.

Svensson, L. Study skill and learning. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1976.

Svensson, L. Some notes on a methodological problem in the study of the relationship between thought and language. - Describing the thought content in terms of different conceptions of the same phenomenon. Reports from the Institute of Education, no 69, 1978.

Säljö, R. Qualitative differences in learning as a function of the learner's conception of the task. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1975.

Säljö, R. Learning and understanding. A study of differences in constructing meaning from a text. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1982.

Theman, J. The interview as a research instrument. Reports from the Institute of Education, University of Göteborg, no 86, 1979.

Theman, J. Uppfattningar av politisk makt. (Conceptions of political power.) Manuscript, 1983.

Reports from the Department of Education, University of Göteborg

1983:01 Lindström, Berner: Learning styles and learning strategies. I. Conversation theory - The work of Gordon Pask. February 1983

1983:02 Svensson, Lennart & Theman, Jan: The relation between categories of description and an interview protocol in a case of phenomenographic research. May 1983